



The History of the Reading Aero Club 1982 – 2017



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THE READING AERO CLUB

Eighty-Five Years of Aviation in Berks County (1932-2017)

In 2017 the Reading Aero Club celebrated 85 years of a continuous presence in Berks County. In recognition of this milestone the Executive Board authorized an update of the Club history to document events that mark the development of the Club from **1982 through 2017**. This account will supplement previous research efforts that were conducted in 1972 and 1982, and which were combined in the 1982 document entitled "The Reading Aero Club Golden Jubilee-50 Years of Aviation in Berks County". The two documents make a complete history of the Club from 1932 through 2017.

The Reading Aero Club is quite remarkable in that we have existed and operated continuously for such a long time. Other Clubs have come and gone. Some exist but are no longer flying clubs. It is said that "the roots of the present are buried deep in the past". Certainly, the Reading Aero Club, as is well documented here, lends credence to that wisdom.

The Executive Board and the History Committee would like to extend thanks the numerous members, past members and interested parties who contributed pictures, stories and other relevant material to the completion of this historical account.

The 1980's

In the early 1980's, the Reading Aero Club (RAC) was starting to enjoy the renovations to the clubhouse which were completed in 1980. It is worthy to note that the Club is still



RAC clubhouse as it appeared most probably in the early 1950's. Note the hangar next door, which is still there.

located in the same clubhouse that was first rented from the Reading Airport Authority in 1965, although at present the Clubhouse includes the entire building. During the 1980's and prior, the Club had only the northwestern end of the building. Other tenants occupied what is now the meeting room. This included the American Bonanza Society, which is

now located in Wichita, Kansas. The evolution of the Clubhouse is further explained in subsequent pages.

In 1982 the Club had two aircraft, both of which were Cherokee 180's. During the 80's and 90's the Club stayed with Cherokee aircraft exclusively. These were N15861 and N6354J. The former, a Cherokee 180 Challenger rented for \$35/ hour and the latter for \$33. An annual for 54J during that year cost the Club \$1201.96.



Standing in front of N15861, probably in the early 1980's; L to R Grant Blimline, Fred Behm, Brian Compton, Vance Rutter, Bob Keith

In January 1983 there were 47 pilot members in the Club. The initiation fee to join the Club was \$300.



Archer 75320 as it appeared at an airshow in the 90's

That May, N6354J was sold for \$14,000 and in the fall, N75320 was purchased. The rates were increased to \$37.50 for 320 and \$34 for 861. In January of 1985, the dues were \$20/month and the initiation fee were raised to \$400.

General aviation in the 1980's was beginning to experience the long and painful upward spiral of fuel prices which still affects the health of the industry today. However, in the 1980's the Club was still experiencing high usage of its aircraft. Club flying consisted of the traditional pilot training, some business flying by members and cross-country flying. As an example, in August of 1984, a total of 70 hours was flown on the two aircraft.

The Aero Club was active in social events both as a Club and on the airport. Numerous fund-raising events and social events were held during the 1980's. Pig roasts and picnics were popular.

In June 1988 the Club had a picnic with a spot landing contest. That same year the Club had a food stand at the air show, which was different than the World War 2 Weekend shows that took over during the 90's. The shows at that time included nationally known performers and featured either the Navy Blue Angels, the Air Force Thunderbirds or the Canadian Snowbirds among many other acts. These always included the venerable Bob Hoover and his P-51 Mustang and Shrike Commander. The Aero Club had food stands as a money maker at most of these shows.

In July of 1988 the Mid Atlantic Air Museum showed a video at a Club meeting about the P-61B Black Widow, a military plane which went down in New Guinea during WW2. There are very few of these still in existence. They explained how they were going to try to recover the aircraft and bring it back to restore it and make it part of the museum.



Airshow at Reading, sometime in the 1980s or 90s

The museum was successful in its effort to recover the plane and was still working on the restoration in 2017 and beyond. It is still on prominent display at the WW2 weekend events. Progress has been slow but steady. The Museum hopes to make it the only flying P-61.

In the summer of 1988, there was \$14,818 in the Club's general account. Two radios were installed in 89N for a total of \$5,500. A new engine for 89N cost \$8000, about one third of the cost of a new engine in 2017.

A new FAA regulation was discussed at the Club meeting in June of 1989. That was the new requirement for a 4096-code altitude encoding transponder in aircraft flying within 30 nautical miles of the primary airport in a "TCA" (Terminal Control Area), which was the predecessor of the current Class B airspace. Pilots today think nothing of this requirement, which still exists. However, in 1989 it was very controversial as many aircraft did not have transponders.

In 1989 the Club participated in another airshow. The Blue Angels performed, and the Club ran its food stand again and made a profit of \$1800.

A golf tournament was held and with a dinner in August of '89. The cost was \$50 per person for golf and dinner.



Gary Wright prepares a Club plane for flight in 1989

Back in the 80s, Club members participated in the annual Inspections of Club aircraft. The cost of the annual was greatly reduced when Club members (at no cost to the Club of course) would disassemble the aircraft under the direction of an A&P. This saved the labor cost of the A&P doing that. In addition, new interiors were routinely installed by Club members at a considerable savings to the Club. It is interesting to note that the cost to fly

Club aircraft in 1989 (actual cost, not hourly charges to members) was \$31.05 for 320, \$28.22 for 861 and \$38.46 for 89N.

In 1989 the by-laws were revised to create a six-month probationary period for new members.

During the 1980's and into the 90's the CommOne was mailed out to members. It wasn't until the 1990's that email began to supplant post office mail for the newsletter.

The 1990's

In January of 1990, the aircraft rental rates were: 861 and 320, \$41/hr. and \$38/hr. for 89N. The Club dues were \$25/month, the initiation fee was \$400 but was raised to \$500 later that year, and the Clubhouse rent was \$500 per year. The total Club assets were valued at \$101,501.

The membership began discussions of a retractable aircraft in 1990. Dr. Gerhart, a well-known FAA Aviation Medical Examiner in the area, had a Piper Arrow for sale and discussions with him took place. The Arrow was eventually taken off the market.

The by-laws were amended in March of 1990 to permit the induction of a Member Emeritus. Grant Blimline was elevated to that status. At the time there were 57 pilot members.

The Club members began planning for the airshow to be held during the summer. This year the Club planned to sell food and park planes for the Airport Authority.

It is noteworthy that in May of 1990 the Wash and Wax drew 20 volunteers and the monthly meeting had 23 attendees. These figures are similar to attendance at these events today.

Interest in a complex aircraft did not abate, and in July of 1990 a committee was formed to investigate the matter. At that time the membership stood at 60 pilot members.

In December of 1990 the Club took its first step into advanced electronic navigation. A Loran receiver was purchased for N75320. It was an Apollo VFR unit and cost approximately \$3900.

Also, in December 1990, Grant Blimline was elected Senior Vice President for life. A by-laws change was required for this position. This award was established to recognize Grant's lifelong commitment to the Club.

Maintenance of Club aircraft had been done for years by Aerodynamics, the shop in the hangar next to the clubhouse. Jay Shearer, a pilot and A&P had done a lot of the work. He was an employee of Aerodynamics and a Club member. During the 1980's he served as on the Board as Maintenance Officer. In December of 1990 he started his own shop

at Deck airport where he was still located in 2017. The Board began splitting the maintenance work between Shearer Aviation and Aerodynamics.

In February of 1991, a by-laws amendment was proposed which would require all members to perform at least 10 hours of service time to the Club each year. The proposal was controversial, and in April the amendment was defeated. This is significant, because



Grant Blimline (right) with member Bob Kirker

much later, in 2015, a similar rule was proposed and passed and is part of the Club member responsibilities today.

Also, in February of 1991, the amendment to the by-laws was proposed making Grant Blimline a Vice President of the Club for life.

In March 1991, a special meeting was held to discuss the purchase of a Piper Arrow. The purchase was approved and N33379 was bought for \$42,400 from a location in Tennessee. The rental rate was set at \$65 per hour. A Club member, Lee McLaughlin, purchased 861 from the Club for \$20,000.



Former member Lee McLaughlin with N15861, which he purchased from the Club in 1991. Lee repainted the aircraft in 1995

A panel mounted intercom was installed in N33379. These were gaining popularity in all General Aviation aircraft. This trend started slowly, with portable intercoms gaining popularity first. Eventually the switch to panel mounted intercoms was almost universal. They were a huge improvement over the speaker and hand-held mikes of old.

In 1991 the cost of fuel was \$1.67/gallon. The Mid Atlantic air Museum moved to Reading after a brief stay at Zerby Airport. A minor accident with the Arrow resulted in a \$3000 repair.

The Club planned its 60th anniversary dinner to be held at the Riveredge Motor Lodge in March of 1992. The Air Show of August 1991 netted the Club between \$5000 and \$6000. By January of 1992, the Club dues were \$25, and the initiation fee was \$500. Club aircraft were N75320, a Cherokee Archer, N7989N a Cherokee 180 and N33379, a Piper Arrow. Member attendance at Club meetings during this period was in the range of 16 members.

In February the Club decided to purchase an Apollo Loran unit (Apollo 628) which was installed in N33379. The Flybuddy Loran in 379 was moved to N7989N.

In March the 60th Anniversary Dance was held. The Swing Fever band played to a small group of only 26 members and guests.

The first computer-based reservation system was in place in April of 1992. The system was located in Bob Keith's office in downtown Reading. It could be accessed by phone only. Users needed a touch tone phone. Up to this point, the Club was still using the clip board reservation system. Members had to drive to the Clubhouse to sign up for a flight, a major inconvenience. It was commonplace for members to call the Clubhouse to see if

anyone was there who could sign them up. In that era, members spent time at the Clubhouse playing cards and socializing, so it was not unusual to find someone there to assist in a sign-up for a reservation. That eliminated the dreaded trip to the airport for the sole purpose of making a reservation.

By April, thirteen members were checked out in the Arrow. The checkout consisted of 10 hours of dual training and a complex endorsement, as dictated by the insurance company and FAA regulations.

A fuel starvation engine-out incident took place in N75320 in June 1992. The off-field landing resulted in \$9700 of wing and landing gear damage. The plane was back in service by August.

The Club decided, in August, to install a three bladed prop on N33379. The theory was that the plane would see a better climb rate and less vibration. In practice, the climb rate improvement was negligible, but the vibration was reduced. The resulting cost was \$3795 after trade-in of the old prop.



RAC first retractable airplane, N33379, a Piper Arrow

In mid-1992, the Club membership was 59 pilot members.

The Club was advised to avoid using runway 18 after dusk, due to deer on the runway. This was a serious problem at that time, as there was no fence along the woods paralleling runway 18. A serious accident (not involving Club aircraft) occurred on the runway involving deer. Major airframe damage, but no bodily injuries, was incurred from striking a deer.

The annual Club Christmas dinner was held at the Clubhouse in 1992. Dinner was provided by Dick Hoffman, who was in the catering business and owner of the Jefferson Drive-In Restaurant.

During 1992 the Club put about 400 hours on each of the three aircraft (1200 total). The Club voted to spend \$4500 to paint N33379.



Pig Roast, 1992. Gary Wright on left

New halon fire extinguishers were purchased for the aircraft. Also, it was decided to put fuel samples back in the tanks after straining the fuel on pre-flight (if they were not contaminated). This was a departure from the traditional method of flinging the sample on the tarmac after checking it for water and dirt. The old method wasted fuel and was harmful to the blacktop as well as the environment.

In mid-1993 the average fleet cost to fly was \$57.03

A phone system was installed which enabled members to listen to the ATIS from the Clubhouse. This seems like a strange upgrade with mobile phones the norm today, but at the time it made flight planning easier.

Dues were increased to \$30 per month in June 1993.

There was an air show in 1993 and the Club sold hot dogs and pork bar-b-que. The profit from the food stand was about \$1630.

In 1994 Avgas cost \$1.96/ gallon. There were 54 pilot members.

A new roof was installed on the clubhouse in May. A pig roast was catered in July.

Longtime member Homer Schonour was honored in 1994 by receiving the Aviator of the Year award. In addition, Homer received lifetime membership to the Club. Homer was a past president and widely respected member. After his passing, the Aviator of the Year award was renamed the Homer Schonour Award in his honor. The annual award still exists today and is awarded to the Club member who did outstanding service to the Club in the preceding year.



Homer Schonour, 2nd from right, in 1990

During the 1990's there was considerable discussion (and argument) about the idea of the Club building its own hangar. The facility would house perhaps five planes and include a meeting room. The idea was advanced because of discussions at the airport Authority level about building a new hangar on the land where the Clubhouse stands. There was concern about where we would go if this happened. A hangar fund was established and a certain amount of money from each hour of flight time was put into the fund. The hangar idea was discussed for years, but ultimately abandoned.

An amusing incident took place in 1995, which illustrates how much times and attitudes have changed. The Club passed a rule which prohibited smoking in the Clubhouse. The rule was controversial but passed because the number of non-smokers outnumbered the smokers. Before that vote smoking took place in the Clubhouse routinely. The smokers complained about the rule and a compromise was later hammered out which permitted smoking in the Clubhouse if no other members were there. Today smoking is prohibited almost everywhere, including the Clubhouse.

In the mid 1990's the Airport Authority began hiring vendors to provide concessions at the Air Show. The Club was asked to park transient aircraft. This was the early stages of a long run of parking aircraft at shows, which was still is a money-making activity for the Club in 2017.

The Club sponsored several Fly-In Safety Seminars during the 90's. In 1995 the seminar featured Ken Medley of AOPA as a speaker, as well as Jim Ryan from the FAA and a speaker from the Flight Service Station in Williamsport.

In 1995 two air shows were held. The traditional Reading Air Show and a show put on by the Mid Atlantic Air Museum. This was the first of many MAAM shows which became a



Club members dressed to park airplanes sometime in the nineties

staple at the airport. The Club continued to park planes and work concessions. In 1995 Club members manned an ice cream and beer stand and netted 10% of the stands take. Overall, in 1995 the club made \$3900 from the beer stand and parking. Over 200 planes were parked.

The age of GPS was dawning during the mid-1990's. Bob Keith, a long-time member and flight instructor, demonstrated a handheld GPS he had purchased at a Club meeting. He advocated the purchase of such a device for Club planes. The cost was still high at that point, so no immediate action was taken.

Club Christmas parties have taken different forms over the years. In the mid-1990s, there were several parties at the Clubhouse. Dick Hoffman, a longtime member and owner of the Jefferson Drive-In restaurant, volunteered to cater the party. Tables were set up and a nice banquet was held during a Club meeting. This format continued for at least two years until it was decided to take the party to other venues.

By 1996 there was more talk about hangar construction on the Club lot. This time it was Aerodynamics (an FBO next door to the Clubhouse) who was discussing the possibilities of tearing down the clubhouse and building a hangar. There was concern about this possibility among club members. More discussion about a Club hangar ensued. The problems always came down to high cost due to utility access, water and sewer, as well as municipal approvals and permit costs. There were two camps: those who felt the Club should have its own presence on the field with a building and those who felt that the Club should not be in the real estate business.

The Club has been fortunate over the years with no serious accidents and relatively few accidents in general. In 1996 there was an incident that could have been serious but fortunately was not. A Club member was on a cross country and ran out of gas about 10 miles south of Reading. To his credit, he put the plane into a field without any serious damage to the plane or occupants. However, it was costly getting the plane out of the field and back into service.

A noticeable drop in flying hours occurred during the mid-90s as a result of higher fuel prices and higher rental costs. Nine hundred sixty-six hours were flown in 1995 compared to a previous high total of 1332 hours in 1987. The hours were declining during the early 1990s. This was a concern to the Club. By today's standards, however, the hours were still very high.

In July of 1996 a significant change took place with weather reporting that affected weather briefs for the past two decades. The METAR and TAF were introduced for present and forecast airport weather, which replaced the familiar SA and FT. Pilots today think nothing of using these products, but it was quite a change when they were first introduced.

Another change occurred in the mid-90s and that was the introduction of the "K" before the letter designator of an airport. Previously, for example, Reading was RDG, but it became KRDG to conform to international standards.

The Club began planning its 65th anniversary celebration. Speakers were investigated for an Anniversary Dinner. Bob Hoover cost \$5000. Julie Clark (another famous aerobatic pilot) was \$2500. Ultimately the Club opted not to have a famous speaker.

The Postal Service changed the official address of the Clubhouse in 1996. Previously the address was R. D. #9 9389, Reading, PA 19605. The county-wide acceptance of the 911 emergency service necessitated all properties to have a street address. The Clubhouse took on its current address of 122 West Apron Drive, Reading, PA 19605.



Members relaxing outside of Clubhouse sometime during the 90's. Present includes Gary Wright, Milo Uber, Pat Hurley, and Javier Rodriguez.

Deer on the runway was a serious concern during the 1990s, especially at night. This was particularly true along runway 18. At that time there was no fence along the woods on the eastern side of the airport. There was at least one serious collision with a deer by an aircraft. There were no injuries, but major damage to the aircraft resulted. It was not unusual for the tower to issue deer alerts to pilots approaching the airport. Stories abounded from pilots who had touched down at night only to look down the runway and see it covered with deer. Later the airport built a fence along that side of the airport which basically eliminated the problem.

Insurance coverage became a problem in the 90s. Previously a club could get a policy known as "\$1 million smooth" which offered \$1 million in liability coverage. That changed in the 90s and policies were limited, usually to \$100,000 per passenger. The difficulty of obtaining full coverage has carried forward to 2017. The insurance policy, in 1997 cost about \$9000 for liability and hull insurance on three aircraft.

Flight hours continued to drop during the late 90s. In 1997 the instructors offered to give a free hour of flight time to members who wanted to get current again, to stimulate hours. Unfortunately, the members who took advantage of it were members who were already flying regularly.

At this time there were numerous articles published that documented the reduction of flight student starts nationwide. In addition, the number of private pilot license and instrument ratings also declined. Clearly, the reduction in Club flight hours was not unusual.

The Club meetings frequently featured speakers on various topics. One particularly memorable talk was provided by John Schack, who flew the ‘hump’ during World War II. John took many slides while stationed in India, and his color slides were amazingly clear and vivid, especially in view of the age of the slides. This presentation was so popular that he presented more than once over the years, much to the enthusiasm of the members present at the meetings.

The first Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Christmas in the Air event was held in 1997. It was called “EAA Give Kids a Ride Day”, later renamed to Christmas in the Air. The idea was to give kids an airplane ride to plant the aviation seed in the young minds. The event has stopped and started over the years.



Kids being boarded onto a Club plane during Christmas In the Air

Part 61 of the FAA regulations (Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors and Ground Instructors) was overhauled by the FAA and released in 1997. The changes were sweeping and beneficial to pilots. For example, prior to this revision, instrument pilots had to perform six hours of actual or simulated instrument time every six months, plus do six approaches. After the change, the six hours of instrument time per six months was dropped. Many other changes were implemented as well.

Up until 1998 the CommOne was mailed to every member each month through the postal service. This was a time consuming and costly process. Labels had to be put on each copy and then taken to the post office for bulk mailing. In March of 1998, the first request

was made for email addresses so that those who had email could receive it electronically. This reduced the cost and labor of getting the newsletter to the membership. Some members did not have email, so their copy was mailed the traditional way. Over a few years, however, virtually everyone began receiving their CommOne by email.

In the previous year, the Club began looking for a yoke mounted GPS. A “loaner” GPS had been tried for a while. It was on loan from a member. In May of 1998, the first panel mounted GPS for the Club was installed in N33379 (Piper Arrow). The unit was the Garmin KLNS155. It was a powerful unit, but difficult to use. Most members only used it for the basic “Direct To” function. However, it had full IFR approach capability. It did not have a color screen.

A club member who owned a sign company offered to create signs for the building. Bob Egan was an active member who donated the signs that were still in use through 2017.

Flight hours picked up during 1998 as a result of new members. The use of N7989N as a cross country aircraft became controversial. Frequently, all the planes were gone during the weekends, with many members taking overnight cross countries. Many felt that at least one aircraft should be available on the weekends for training.



Ted Hershberger explains aircraft operation to Boy Scouts during a Merit badge program

With flight hours up, a fourth aircraft was discussed seriously. In September of 1999, the Club purchased N5877V, a Piper Archer. With four aircraft now available, the scheduling problem was resolved, at least temporarily. One thing that was learned however, from having four aircraft. The total hours per month on Club aircraft didn't increase as anticipated. The same hours were simply spread over four aircraft.

During the end of the decade, the club continued to perform aircraft parking and concessions for the airshow. Boy Scout merit badge programs were completed at the clubhouse. On at least one occasion, airplane rides were given to Scouts who were interested.

Angel Flight was introduced to the club in 1999. This is a volunteer organization where pilots volunteer their plane and time to fly patients to hospitals or other facilities where the patient does not have the financial means to do so on their own. Several Club members flew numerous Angel Flights over the years.

The 2000's

In the early 2000s an event occurred that changed aviation forever. That was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Many new rules and regulations came out of the aftermath of 9/11. For example, the Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR), previously an arcane provision that was almost never used, became part of every flight. TFR's needed to be checked prior to each flight. Other rules regarding flight training evolved. New flight students had to be approved by the Transportation Security Administration before they could get a student pilot license. Flight Instructors and flight school employees were required to undergo training once per year on how to detect unusual behavior in persons around an airport.

New airspace was also created, most notably the Special Flight Rules Area around Washington, D. C. Pilots now had to learn many more rules and regulations as a result of the 9/11 tragedy.

In 2002 the first internet connection in the Clubhouse was installed. This was done by Tony Talarigo, a member and computer technician. Tony performed many computer related services for the club during his membership. For example, he set up the first RAC website in 2002.

At the beginning of the new century, the Club was in the northwestern end of the Clubhouse. Other tenants had come and gone in the southeastern end. By the early 2000s the Club officers became increasingly concerned about the condition of the southeastern end, particularly the condition of the roof. Neglect had resulted in the roof collapsing at several spots and water was getting in. The Club was worried that the northwestern end would be affected, since the two were attached. The Club approached the airport Authority about taking over the other end. The Authority agreed, provided that the club put on a new roof. The Club agreed.



Club members remove old roof and install trusses

The “new Clubhouse” renovation began with the new roof. The January 2004 day selected for the roof installation was very cold: in the single digits. But the Club members showed up and the roof was installed. The renovation continued over several years, until 2007. A total of about \$17,000 was spent on materials. The labor was all performed by Club members with only a few exceptions.



Club members warm up during the roof replacement.



The two photos on top are of the new meeting room, looking northwest. The bottom two are of the meeting room, looking southeast. The bathroom is on the right in the bottom photos.

In the early 2000's the Club began parking of transient aircraft for the World War II weekend event, which was put on by the Mid Atlantic Air Museum. Another contribution by Tony Talarigo was his idea to sell water at the event as a money maker. The idea was pitched to the Museum, and they agreed to let the Club have a small location on the tarmac as a base, so wagons with water bottles could be pulled through the crowd. In 2002 the Club earned over \$2000 at the WW2 event. In 2017, the fund raiser was still in practice.



Tom and Wendy DiBello and other Club members sell water at WWII Weekend

The Club continued to move away from the LORAN units and convert to GPS. A yoke mounted unit was purchased for 75320 and the LORAN was removed in 2002.

In 2004, Garmin 430s were installed in 89N and 77V. This equipment was a very sophisticated panel mounted GPS, and officially brought the entire Club fleet into the GPS age. A lot of training was done during this period to familiarize members with the gear.

The same year the Club sold N75320 to an out of state buyer.



Garmin 430 GPS unit which was eventually installed in all Club aircraft

In 2006, the Club boasted 62 members. Aircraft rental rates were \$64 and \$69 per hour for the Club Archers, and \$78 per hour for the Arrow. Dues were raised to \$50 per month.

The Club renovated the southeastern end of the Clubhouse building during the early 2000's but did not use it for anything significant until 2007, when the first meeting was held in that part of the building. A problem surfaced quickly regarding the cost of the electric heat in the new meeting room. The bills were prohibitively high. The meetings were moved back to the old side of the building until the problem could be resolved.



New Clubhouse meeting room and kitchen

Mark Runge, a contractor and member, converted the clubhouse to propane. This was a big project, since no ductwork was installed in the new meeting room because the heat was supposed to be electric. Mark installed the ductwork and the propane furnace, which worked very well, and which saved the Club a lot of money over the years.

Christmas in the Air continued to be popular with the Club members. Every year a few members would volunteer to fly kids on their first airplane ride. In 2007 over 400 children participated.

The Club had been a Cherokee club for a long time. Many members were satisfied with that model and did not want to change the composition of Club aircraft. There was a growing number of members, however, who favored including a Cessna in the fleet. The thinking was that new members who favored Cessna would join the Club if we could offer one. This difference of opinion was the source of many lively meetings.

The controversy continued for years until most of the Club favored the purchase of a Cessna. Several candidates were brought to Club meetings for inspection. A Cessna 172RG was test flown by Club instructors and recommended for purchase. However, after animated discussion it was ultimately voted down. Members did not want to pay for the 10 hours required by the insurance company for a check-out in an aircraft with retractable landing gear.

Finally, a 1999 C172S was located at Queen City Airport. It was in excellent condition and only 18 years old (relatively new by airplane standards). The plane, N2373K, was brought to a Club meeting and the members were, by in large, very impressed. A vote was taken and in February 2007, the Club purchased it for approximately \$106,000. This amount was by far the most money ever spent for a Club aircraft.



N2373K

After many years of service to the Club, the Arrow (N33379) was starting to become a maintenance headache. Landing gear issues plagued the Club and there was ensuing discussion about selling the plane. This move was controversial because many members favored that plane over all others. However, the cost of the rental was climbing due to the high operating cost. As a result, fewer hours were flown in the Arrow, which drove the cost even higher. A decision was made to sell it, and in January 2008, the plane was sold for \$70,000.

In May of 2008, the rental price of both the Archer and the Cessna 172 was reduced. This was a result of lower fuel prices and more hours flown.

The general accounting records of the Club were always paper account ledgers up until 2008. Paul Jones and Bob Keith began the arduous task of converting the records to digital format. This enabled the Club to evaluate financial questions at a keystroke. Flight hours, cost per hour, and profit and loss were suddenly available on a monthly basis. The conversion put the Club on a much firmer footing financially, since previously the manual system made such reports very labor intensive.

In 2008, the Club Christmas Party was held at the Chef Alans Bistro, Fairgrounds Mall.

Among many new regulatory requirements that resulted from 9/11, the Transportation Safety Administration began requiring all tenants of Reading airport to have and wear ID badges on the field. This requirement was widely despised, and expressions of disapproval were not hard to find. The Club President at the time, John Toomey, in his monthly CommOne letter to the members, declared: "This is an onerous requirement which we find intrusive, cumbersome, costly and absurd".

However, despite the protest, the badge rules went into effect and Club members began paying \$25 for a badge which was valid for two years. About eight years later the requirement was changed, requiring only the annual training for pedestrians on the field (such as most club members). A badge was only required for those driving a vehicle inside the fence.

In 2009 the GPS in N2373K was upgraded from a King unit to a Garmin 430w. This was the first WAAS (Wide Area Augmentation System) unit the Club purchased. The technology is much more accurate than the earlier GPS units.

The Club rules changed over the years regarding membership. The Student Membership was an attempt to give potential student members an opportunity to try the Club and flying to see if they liked it prior to paying the entire initiation fee. This program was very successful, and in 2009 was extended to new members of any type. The "Transitional Membership" program was very successful and afforded an opportunity for new members to fly with an instructor while the membership process was completed.

The Club has always tried to feature the skills and talents of members by having them give presentations at meetings, or even by hosting field trips if appropriate. An example

of this took place in May of 2009 when Club member Nancy D'Angelo, an FAA air traffic controller, invited club members to the Allentown tower where she worked for a tour of the facilities. An informative and entertaining evening was enjoyed by all who attended.



Nancy D'Angelo helps out at a Wash and Wax

Berks County Television (BCTV) frequently features local organizations and provides a forum for them to present their program to the general public. In 2009, Bob Keith organized a BCTV program featuring the Reading Aero Club. Several programs were made under the title of "Aviation in Berks", the first of which aired in May of 2009. A later program featured several women members and focused on women in aviation in Berks County



Left to right; Bob Keith, John Toomey, Ted Hershberger, and Gholam Ahmadi form the panel for the first "Aviation in Berks" program on BCTV presented by RAC

The Christmas Party was held at Meadowbrook Country Club in 2009. During this period that venue was very popular for the annual Club bash. A disc jockey was hired to provide music and a caterer brought in food. The Club continued to hold the party at this location for several years.



Members and guests enjoy the annual party at the Meadowbrook Country Club

The 2010's

2010 was a very significant year for the Club. Two things happened that changed the way things were done. The first of these was the increase in hangar dues by the Reading Jet Center, which almost doubled the monthly rent. As a result, the club moved the planes to the ramp and used covers to protect them. This worked in the warm months but when the snow fell, access to the planes became problematic, and flights were frequently cancelled because the planes could not taxi through the snow until the ramp was plowed, which sometimes took a few days.

Other hangar options were investigated, and the tee hangars were the most attractive. The Club was placed on the waiting list, and eventually (after several months), one of the Club planes found a home in the tee hangars. Months later the second plane obtained a hangar.

The tee hangar operations were considerably different than the operations in the Reading Jet Center hangars. There were no linemen to pull the planes in and out of the hangar or to fuel the planes after a flight. All of that had to be done by the members. Electric tugs were purchased to pull the planes out of the hangar, and members had to contact Millennium Air for fuel. This was a different world.



Brian Stoltzfus and Guy Wicks work on removal of the wings from N2373K

The second major event of 2010 was an accident that occurred with N2373K. A student pilot on a cross country made a hard landing and struck the prop at Salisbury, Maryland. The damage was extensive as the firewall was damaged. Members went to Salisbury

and, with the help of two mechanics, took the wings off the plane and towed it home on a trailer.



N2373K without wings or empennage loaded for trip back to Reading.

The plane was transported to Hagerstown, Maryland where it was repaired by Hagerstown Air Service. The plane performed very well after the repairs, but unfortunately it took five months to get the plane back from Hagerstown.



Aircraft leased by RAC during the time N2373K was being repaired.

Due to the length of time without a plane, the Club entered into a Lease Back agreement with the owner of an older Cessna 172. This aircraft was not particularly popular with the members, but it helped fill the gap left by 73K while it was being repaired.

Beginning in 2001 the Club started to notice a gradual decline in membership. This trend continued until 2016 and was due in part to the effects of the 9/11 tragedy and later the Great Recession, which began in 2008.

The Club tried different methods of maintaining and increasing membership. Open houses were held four times during the period in 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2016. Members Dave Kalbach, Tom DiBello and Shawn Borelli organized the events and invited hundreds of pilots who were possible candidates for membership. Most open houses were successful at signing up new members.

The Club joined the world of social media in 2016 and used it to generate interest for the open house that year. Shawn Borelli was instrumental in getting the Club involved in it. That event resulted in eight new applications for membership.



Club members, including Dale Litwhiler and Rick Lauter (both to right) repair the clubhouse roof.

The members of the Reading Aero Club participated in the Salvation Army Christmas Drive for several years beginning in 2010. Members manned the “kettle” at the Berkshire Mall in shifts, raising considerable funds for the charity.

Electronic Flight Bags were gaining popularity during these years, especially the use of the iPad and other tablets. ForeFlight, an electronic flight planning and navigation app, gained enormous popularity. The traditional paper charts and approach plates were replaced with the electronic version on an iPad or other tablet. During the ensuing years until the end of this historical account (2017), electronic apps like ForeFlight, Garmin Pilot and some others made breathtaking inroads into the general aviation market. Eventually



Steve Schory, Guy Wicks, and Jim Franey man the registration table at the 2010 Open House

the traditional paper charts were relegated to the status of back up navigation aids and many pilots would not think of flying without their iPad.



Bob Keith, CFI and mentor, is recognized for his service to the Reading

In 2011, long time member, past President and flight instructor Bob Keith retired from active flying. He was made a Member Emeritus by the membership in recognition of his many contributions to the Club over thirty plus years.

A Pinch Hitter course was provided by the Club in 2012. The course, designed for the spouses of pilots, attracted 10 participants. Instructors John Toomey, Ted Hershberger and Brian Stoltzfus provided the instruction which consisted of about four hours of classroom presentation and a voluntary flight with an instructor. The program was well received.



Participants in the first RAC Pinch Hitter course, 2012

The Club began a long-standing tradition in 2012 to donate a free flight to the Berks County TV annual auction. The flight was a sightseeing tour of Berks County flown by a qualified Club member. There were some hoops to clear with the FAA before the flight could be made, but this charitable donation was very popular with the auction participants.

In October of 2012 the Club celebrated its 80th anniversary with a Planes, Trains and Automobiles show in a grassy area near the Clubhouse. A similar event took place the following year. The shows featured a car show, helicopter rides, model trains and for the second event, a balloon on a tether. While not a great success financially, the shows were a lot of fun.

Social events continued to be popular during this era. Examples were, in addition to the Christmas Party at Meadow Brook Country Club there was a ball game outing to see the Reading Phillies, a dinner event at Ninos Restaurant, and a wine and cheese event at Baldwin Brass.



Brian Stoltzfus demonstrates his paraglider at the Trains, Planes, and Automobiles event

An instrument ground school was presented by the Club instructors in 2013. Instructors Ted Hershberger, John Toomey and Brian Stoltzfus presented a complete course based on the Gleim curriculum. Several attendees passed their knowledge test and completed their instrument ratings.

A new aircraft was added to the inventory in June of 2013. The venerable N5877V was sold for \$48,000. The new plane, N168F, was a 1999 Piper Archer III. Previous Archers owned by the Club were the Archer II model. The aircraft was purchased from an owner in California for \$110,000.



N168F

Over the years the Club would occasionally host speakers at the monthly meeting. Speakers included Club members who had something very interesting to say. For example, long time member John Schock, who flew “The Hump” in World War II, told his story to the members several times. Other WWII flyers spoke as well, including Dr. Constantine of Fleetwood, who also flew the “Hump”. In 2013, Dr. Terry Hart, a NASA astronaut on the Challenger, gave a talk to the Club entitled “100 Years of Aeronautical Engineering”. In 2014 the Club enjoyed a talk by Berks County Sherriff Eric Weaknecht.



Former Space Shuttle astronaut Dr. Terry Hart with Club President Ted Hershberger following his talk to the Club in

Club members have many talents which have been demonstrated in interesting ways. Longtime member Steve Kunkle was no exception. Steve built an experimental category



Steve Kunkle and his wife Judy in front of his Experimental Mustang at Oshkosh in 2014.

airplane from scratch. It was modeled after the P51 Mustang. Steve entered it in a competition at Oshkosh in 2014 and received an award for excellent workmanship! This was quite an accomplishment. A few years later Steve restored a Taylorcraft.

After many years of the Club Christmas party being held at Meadowbrook Country Club, the venue was moved in 2014 to Panevino's Restaurant in downtown Reading.

Another Pinch Hitter program was held in 2016. This was done in response to the favorable reception of the earlier program presented by the Club. As before, participants listened to several hours of prepared ground school, and had the option of taking a flight with a Club instructor.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association promoted a program designed to get pilots who had not flown for a long time back into the air. The "Rusty Pilot" seminar was presented by RAC instructors John Toomey, Brian Stoltzfus and Ted Hershberger in March of 2016 at the Terminal Building. Participants received the ground training requirement for a Flight Review.

Another FAA mandate resulted in a significant expense for the club and most other aircraft owners. By January 2020, all aircraft operating in airspace requiring a transponder were required to install ADS-B equipment. This equipment will eventually replace radar and uses GPS to establish aircraft position. The Club installed the equipment in both aircraft. The equipment installed was ADS-B "in and out", which provides required information to ATC, and in addition, provides information to the pilot in the form of real time radar, weather reports and more.

In order to improve the meeting room for presentations, speakers, etc., the Club installed a projector suitable for connection to an iPad or laptop. A new screen and speakers were also installed in 2016.

FAA medical certification was a problem for many general aviation pilots prior to 2017. Approval of relatively benign medical conditions could take months, keeping pilots on the ground. In 2017, AOPA scored a significant win with the FAA adoption of the Basic Med program, which allows pilots to fly most operations with only a Basic Med certification which previously required a 3rd Class medical. The primary difference is that the Basic Med certification can be approved by a family doctor. This eliminates the long review process by the FAA. Many pilots are back in the air as a result.

Conclusion

For those of us who have belonged to the Club for many years, it is interesting to revisit some of the events that shaped the Clubs path through its history. For newer members, this document should be helpful in learning what made the Club what it is today.

This is the third effort in documenting the history of the Reading Aero Club. We have been diligent in preserving our past and resolve to do so as we move forward into the next chapter of our love affair with aviation.